

Dear Northern Great Lakes Synod,



As I write this, it is the Monday after our 34th Synod Assembly. We are in the second year of a three-year theme focused on the passage from I Corinthians, “And now Faith, Hope, and Love Abide, these three.” We know the greatest of these is love, but

this year we are focusing on Faith.

Martin Luther describes faith as a “living, busy, active, mighty thing.” As Lutherans, we teach that faith is a gift. And yet, faith is dynamic and moving, less a package to be opened and more a relationship to be nurtured - less a possession, and more a commitment of trust. In these last couple of pandemic years when we have had to work harder to stay connected, I think we understand more clearly the part that we play in building and nurturing our faith community.

Synod Assembly is a perfect example of what we do to build our faith community and celebrate a wider view of church. I hope you felt connected as you gathered in person as a voting member, participated in the week of online workshops, or watched the business meeting livestream.

I believe for the most part, things went smoothly. The sound was a little uneven from conference to conference, but people were willing to repeat their question or comment until we all understood.

One thing that I do not believe was understood fully was the reasoning and purpose of Resolution #7. In the fall of 2021, I was presented with the requirement to amend our constitution by our Churchwide Secretary, Sue Rothmeyer, who was being proactive in ensuring the 60/40 balance of lay and clergy voting members at synod assemblies in order to forestall any disputes as to the legality of a given outcome in future elections. We are one of a few synods who still have the provision in our constitution that all retired

rostered leaders in attendance at Synod Assembly receive both voice and vote.

Concern over lay and clergy balance has not been an issue in our synod before as so many pastors who have retired have not stayed geographically in our synod. Many, after retirement, have stayed on our NGLS roster, but they have moved far away and never expected to attend Synod Assembly.

In the last few years, this has changed, and more of our retired pastors have chosen to stay local and may well plan to attend Synod Assembly.

Granted, we are not the Florida/ Bahamas Synod, where I am guessing retired clergy outnumber active clergy and lay voting members combined, but the challenge to defend the constitutional requirement of at least 60% lay voting membership at Synod Assembly is the same.

Other synods have chosen different methods. Some ensure the balance by saying that:

1. No retired pastors are given voting privileges unless they are serving a congregation as an interim.
2. The retired pastors meet and agree who among them will represent their vote. The amount of voting members is a certain percentage of the total retired clergy population, often 10%.



After my conversation with Sue Rothmeyer, I sent an email to all our retired pastors presenting them with the issue. I invited them to a Zoom meeting and welcomed their input. If they could not attend the Zoom, I asked that they send me their thoughts via email. I welcomed their ideas as to how best to constitutionally ensure the required balance.

Currently we have, or soon will have, 61 retired clergy on our roster, 35 of which might reasonably be expected to attend Synod Assembly. If each

congregation sends their full number of lay people, we would see about 170 lay people at Synod Assembly, which would allow 110 clergy to be voting members. Assuming that 79 congregations will send a clergyperson (knowing that some have a License Lay Minister), this allows for roughly 31-32 retired clergy to be voting members.

If, like some synods, we went with 10% of retired clergy, that would only afford 6 retired clergy the privilege of voting. Wanting to maximize the number of retired clergy who could vote, the proposal was made to wait until registration closed, have a hard number of lay voting members and active clergy, and from that, calculate the remaining balance of 40% of clergy and how many retired clergy could then vote.

I am very glad that more retired pastors are choosing to stay on the territory of the NGLS. They offer invaluable support and wisdom to the church, helping the work of ministry in countless ways even after retirement. I continue to be deeply grateful for their partnership and willingness to help. Having to limit, even a few, from the privilege of voting at Synod Assembly is a reality that this resolution seeks to address as fairly as possible, maximizing the voting participation of retired clergy who attend Synod Assembly.

What can you do?

- Maximize the amount of lay people your congregation sends to Synod Assembly and pay attention to gender balance.
- Rotate Synod Assembly participation among your members, giving more people the joy and witness of being church together.
- Next year we will be in person. Please include travel expense, hotel expense, and registration cost in your congregational budget for next year. Registration will be more like it was pre-COVIC, about \$180 per person.

- As always, the registration fee for retired clergy is waived.

Synod Assembly is energizing, joyful, informative, and Spirit blessed. We are church together, and never more so than when we worship and partner in ministry together.

This year was good, but I look forward to us all being together, in person, next year.

Yours in Christ,

Bishop Katherine Finegan